

STREE SUTRA

Essays on Gender, Caste and Faith in India

TANAY V

Student Researcher & Author

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To Karnataka Maate (Mother Karnataka)

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About the Author

Tanay V is an Undergraduate student pursuing a Bachelor of Art's degree in Economics, Political Science, and Sociology at St Joseph's University, Bangalore. His academic interests lie within the social sciences, with a focused engagement in women's studies, social structures, and contemporary gender-related issues. He has undertaken research-based fieldwork involving interviews with individuals and non-governmental organizations, and he is also actively involved in working with an NGO, gaining practical exposure to grassroots social realities.

Tanay has authored and published two articles and has participated in several academic seminars and conferences, demonstrating sustained scholarly involvement. In addition to his academic pursuits, he practices Tanjore painting and has a strong interest in Carnatic singing, reflecting an interdisciplinary engagement with cultural and artistic traditions. This book is driven by his belief that sensitive and underrepresented topics require rigorous academic attention and meaningful public discourse.

P R E F A C E

When I was sixteen years old, I first had the idea to write a book after learning that my Kannada teacher had written and published one. And when I was seventeen, the thought surfaced once more, but it was prevented by studies and a dearth of research. But now that I'm eighteen and have mentors and teachers with experience, I'm creating this book. One of my dreams, which I never imagined would come true, was to have my book published.

When society attempts to silence certain topics by labelling them as sensitive subjects that should not be discussed publicly, I felt compelled to write about those subjects that others are reluctant to discuss and attempt to present them in the form of books, research papers, and articles so that they don't feel abandoned.

The book covers a wide range of topics, including pieces that are now chapters. The articles cover a wide range of subjects, primarily in the Indian setting, including prostitution in the context of Devadasis, rape and its forms, religious and social taboos on Hindu women during menstruation, transgender people, Dalit and many more.

Books, essays, research papers, newspaper stories, and many more publications that were sourced under the supervision of professionals made up a large portion of the material gathered.

This book is intended for readers who want to comprehend the social forces that have historically positioned women in supporting positions and privileged males as dominant individuals. Inviting individuals from diverse fields and backgrounds to participate in these discussions and read more works that question these hierarchies, it also seeks to attract readers with an interest in gender and cultural studies.

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CHAPTER I – SACRED HISTORIES

Article 1: Prostitution In India: From ‘Ritual Servitude’ to ‘Modern Sex Work’

Under the Supervision of Dr Maria A

Introduction:

Kingsley Davis defined Prostitution as ‘That form of Sexual Behaviour which has its end in itself, and is engaged in without emotional involvement, and for which Payment is made’. (Kingsley Davis, 1937).

According to many sociologists, prostitution is a social institution that was brought about by urbanization, patriarchy, and economic inequality. In India, prostitution has existed since the beginning of civilization, therefore it is nothing new. It has always existed in a variety of covert forms, but urbanization and modernization have made it more visible to the outside world.

The pressure from the Social Elements and their desires act as a catalyst in triggering the Sexual Transgression of Females (Divya R, 2025).

For many years, Prostitution was only for women, but in the modern world, it has spread to include men and transgender people.

How It Came into Existence?

It is frequently referred to as the world's oldest profession. The institution of marriage as we know it now did not exist in early primitive societies, and sexual relations were communal. As civilizations grew more structured, limitations were placed on them through kinship, inheritance, and marriage systems. Widows, slaves, and poor women who were left out of these institutions began having sex with men in order to survive.

Sinha and Basu (1933) trace Prostitution in Ancient India as a Social Institution which has remained in existence since many centuries rather than just a marginal.

practice. In early Vedic Societies, Courtesans (Ganika's, Nagar Vadhus) were not just mere sexual figures who were skilled in Dance and Music, they enjoyed the prestige of Royal Courts and also received gifts from Rulers and Subjects too. Texts like Arthashastra describe how these Courtesans were treated equally as other subjects and also paid taxes which contributed to the economy of the kingdom.

Devadasi System:

The devadasi system is a social-cultural practice that exists mostly in the southern states of India and is believed to have originated between 6th and 7th Century. The term 'devadasi' means 'female slave of god' (Tarachand, 1992). It is said that these devadasis served gods and later men, as their slaves and considered it as an honour (Vishwanathan, 2008). The devadasi system is a social and religious practice of dedicating young girls to Hindu temples in India (Shingal, 2015). A Dalit girl is asked to serve the temple {her home} and the god {her husband} after being married off to a Hindu deity.

Altekar (1959) defines the devadasi system as:

'When temples of Hindu gods came to be built and endowed on a magnificent scale, some people began to feel in course of time that there should be singing girls attached to shrines to play music on the occasions of the different services and worships of the day... The introduction of dancing girls in temples tended to lower their moral and spiritual atmosphere. Some people began to visit shrines not so much to pay their respect to the deities, as to carry on their love intrigues with the singing girls employed there'.

As a result, these girls are sexually exploited and are raped by temple priests, people belonging to dominant castes and devotees as well. After a certain age, when these girls are not considered 'ideal' for temple service they are abandoned to lead a life full of humiliation. With no other choice they turn to Prostitution to earn their living as no one else marries them or supports them economically (Orchard 2007).

Due to economic problems families dedicate their young girls as devadasis and after a certain period of time these former devadasis dedicate their daughters as devadasis entering a practice of a never ending inter-generational cycle (Amit Anand,2024).

The devadasi practice, unfortunately, has also become a means for poor Dalit families to unburden themselves of their daughters (Harishankar and Priyamvadha, 2016).

Dalit women, who are the most vulnerable group of women in Indian society, are the focus of the exploitative devadasi system. Young Dalit girls are sexually assaulted and exploited as a result of this practice, which forces them to engage in "commercial sexual activity," or prostitution.

Religious customs like the Devadasi system linked prostitution to temple service, making it a "holy profession" and the prostitute a "holy body," despite the fact that they were being taken advantage of by "devotees."

Furthermore, during the Medieval period, temples began getting huge donations first from kings and later from landlords and as a result, they gradually assumed the status of social-financial institutions (Mishra and Rao, 2005). The priests believed that they should expand the temple's space and begin more rites as the hundi gradually filled up, but they also needed more attendants to maintain the grounds. As a result, the temple hired a large number of girls as servants, who not only performed as slaves but also sang and danced at holy events.

Prostitution In Ancient India {by the Arthashastra}:

Prostitution existed in ancient India as well, and it served as a catalyst for the establishment of a harlots' organization. Although Chanakya described the tasks and actions of prostitutes in the Arthashastra and considered prostitution to be a lucrative occupation, he said nothing about their relationship to the temple devadasis.

Three groups of these sex workers were identified:

- a) Prostitutes Royal
- b) City-Level Prostitutes
- c) Private Prostitutes or a group of prostitutes controlled by a private individual, and the state had authority over all three of these categories.

Pratiganika, Rupajiva, Vesya, Dasi, Devadasi, Punchsali, and Silpakarika were the names given to these "prostitutes," which denoted higher-level or specific types of prostitutes. Ganikadhyaksha, a supervisor, was assigned to supervise the prostitutes and ensure that they paid the state and gave presents. He also had an obligation to control their daily spending, income, and inheritance (Aya).

Additionally, Arthasastra provides us with a summary of these prostitutes' biodata.

Freedom for these prostitutes weren't given for free of cost, they had to make a payment of 24,000 Panas as a ransom to the state. As they were servants of the state, the state would lose its income if prostitutes were given freedom to walk away. (G. Kuppuram, 1979)

The Period of Transition/Change:

Devadasis who were exploited and married off to temples gradually began to realize that they could make money not only from the temple's funds but also by selling their bodies. As a result, they began to turn the temple grounds into a brothel house, which attracted more clients than devotees. These so-called devadasis were now fully referred to as "prostitutes" in the contemporary sense. Courtesans and Ganika's lost their financial support as a result of wars and natural disasters, and they were deprived of patronage and left without a means of subsistence. As a result, they began to engage in sexual relations with affluent men outside of the temple or kingdom in order to survive. Their body's ceremonial devotion grew symbolic throughout time, and their sexual exploitation began to progressively increase.

It was later by the British Regime that these forms of entertainment were regarded as signs of Sexual Depravity in the natives. The nautch girl became a detestable category and her performance, amorous and vulgar. (Shabad Bano, 2009-2010)

Prostitution in Modern Day India: Focus on Ghegholi:

In rural India, hundreds of women from lower caste families make sex trade their livelihood. Few of them escape the old system of sex commerce from which they are born.

The oldest occupation in the world, prostitution has been practiced for many ages in India. There are an estimated 3 million sex workers in India between the ages of 15 and 35, as sex work is allowed there.

Women from Nats, Bhedia, and Kanjar nomadic tribes are constrained by an antiquated caste structure that has made prostitution a custom in the village of Ghegholi in Rajasthan's Alwar district.

They were considered a threat by the British Colonial Power and performed as dancers, jugglers, magicians, and performers before being forced into sex work. These women wait for customers to feed their families and children while they stand at the road dressed up. They call this a profession by choice and are motivated to pursue it not only by tradition but also by poverty and debt. These families are caught in a vicious loop as a result of local money lenders charging exorbitant interest rates because banks refuse to provide money because they do not view sex industry as job.

They are unable to escape this vicious cycle and wait for a ray of light that would break it because of the existence of social stigma and superstitions.

Red Light Areas in India:

Although it is officially illegal to operate a brothel in India (De Jure), several places nonetheless have them. The biggest and most well-known red-light districts in India are:

The largest red-light district in Asia is Sonagachi, Kolkata, where there are approximately 10,000–16,000 female prostitutes.

With over 5000 sex workers, Kamathipura, Mumbai, is the country's second-largest red-light district.

Budhwar Peth, Pune, is the country's third-largest red-light district, with 700 brothels employing about 5000 sex workers.

About 3500 sex workers work in Chaturbhuj Sthan, Muzaffarpur, a Bihar

red-light district.

Other Red-Light Districts include Nagpur's Ganga Jamuna and Delhi's G. B. Road. Due to poverty, a lack of food or shelter, and occasionally the involvement of orphans, girls of both legal and juvenile ages are coerced and pushed into these brothel houses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, prostitution and the devadasi system are products of several interrelated causes that together represent structural violence against women, and sociocultural norms in Indian society uphold patriarchal beliefs. They were and remain caught in an endless cycle. Indian society still considers this style of life to be "dirty" even after learning that their husbands and wives engage in these sexually suggestive behaviours. Prostitution was developed by society for society, not something that just happened.

Article 2: The Women Who Bless in the Signals of Bangalore: A Historical Perspective on Transgender Communities in India

Introduction:

The self-written piece "The Women Who Wait in the Signals of Bangalore" explores the historical aspect of transgender people in India who have faced and continue to face discrimination in Indian society. There were transgender people in the country even before the colonists arrived. They have been around since the dawn of time, and this article will highlight the historical aspects of transgender people in India through the use of research papers, mythological and ancient texts, and other sources. They were mentioned in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra as well. This post will attempt to highlight the fact that the women that stand in Bangalore's signals are not merely women or transgender people; rather, they are the offspring of a spiritual entity.

Hindu Mythological Texts:

The Hindu Texts and Mythological Stories speak a lot on Gender Fluidity and has also mentioned about Transgenders and other 3rd Genders.

Ardhanarishvara: "Ardha" means "Half," "Nari" means "woman" or "female," and "Ishvara" means "Shiva" or "male." Ardhanarishvara is a representation of the non-duality of gender since the masculine and feminine energy, two celestial elements, are united into a single shape.

One of Lord Vishnu's ten incarnations is Mohini. Simply said, Mohini means "beautiful enchantress." In order to acquire Amrit, the Devatas (Gods) and Asuras (Demons) churned the cosmic ocean (Ksheera Sagara) during the Samudra Manthan, giving rise to this Avatar. Because the Devatas did not want the Amrit to be shared with the Asuras once the Pot of Amrit was retrieved, Mohini—a manifestation of the divine Maya (Illusion)—enters the scene as an exceptionally beautiful woman. She distributed the Amrit among the Devatas by using her enchantment. This shape demonstrates the divinity and fluidity of gender transition.

A particular Mythological story takes us where Mohini (Female form of Vishnu) and Shiva lead to the birth of Ayyappan, a deity born from a divine union which is beyond gender norms.

Ancient Texts and Literature:

Skanda Purana: Aravan's marriage to Koothandavar, a transgender person, is mentioned in the Skanda Purana. Trans women in Tamil Nadu continue to perform this rite during the Koovagam Festival.

Mahabharata: The Mahabharata is one of the two major Hindu epics. There are numerous stories in the Mahabharata that discuss gender fluidity and transsexualism. Stories like the one of Shikhandi, who was born as Amba and later changed into a man to become a warrior, are common. The tale of Aravan is another. His narrative is crucial to South Indian trans culture and ceremonies. He was the child of Arjuna and Ulupi.

The existence of Ardhanarishvara, a figure that symbolizes gender harmony and is half Shiva and half Parvati, is mentioned in the Shiva Purana.

Mallanaga Vatsyayana's Kamasutra: It is among the most significant ancient manuscripts that discuss Kama Shastra. The existence of Tiritiya Prakriti, or third-gender people, is described, and they are further divided into two categories:

1] A masculine physique with feminine characteristics

2] Masculine characteristics but a feminine body

Other works: Certain works of Kalidasa, Sangam Literature, Manusmriti, Ramayana and many other texts speak about transgenders, their existence and gender fluidity.

Conclusion:

Some segments of society continue to refer to them as a modern concept and associate them with colonialism, even after their presence has been documented in ancient literature. The key point is that, as evidenced by the Kamasutra, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other works, they were accepted in ancient Indian society. So why aren't some segments of contemporary Indian society accepting them?

The unpleasant reality is that these transgender persons who bless people in exchange for money are frequently harassed, yelled at, and shouted at by the public, yet despite all of this, they still manage to smile and continue to give back to society.

CHAPTER II – LAW AND THE BODY

Article 3: Beyond Nirbhaya: Marital Rape, Child Abuse, and the Expanding Frontiers of Sexual Violence in India

Under the Supervision of Dr Ance Teresa Varghese

Introduction:

Diana. E. H. Russell, a Feminist Sociologist defined Rape as “any act of sexual penetration committed against a person’s will, through the use of force, threat, or manipulation” (Diana. E. H. Russell, 1984).

Our daily newspapers today routinely report on rape, a sinful crime committed by men and women of our universe that was far less common in the past. Every culture has a number of rape instances, but very few of them are reported to the authorities. While some publicized cases—like the Nirbhaya Rape Case—are discussed on news channels for hours or even days, others are still kept out of the public view. There are numerous different forms of rape that occur with or without our knowledge, in addition to the ones we see in the news or in our daily newspapers.

In 2021, India recorded 31,677 rape cases, or almost 86 rapes each day, and nearly 49 crime cases against women were reported per hour, according to a government report.

The varieties of rape and the legislative actions taken by the government to lower the crime rate are the main topics of this article.

Marital Rape in India: ‘A hidden, less-discussed crisis’:

Diana. E. H. Russell defines marital rape as “any unwanted intercourse or penetration (vaginal, anal, or oral) obtained by force, threat of force or when the wife is unable to consent”. (Diana. E. H. Russell, 1982).

India is a lovely country that is thriving and has representation in every

field. However, sexual violence against women still occurs not only when men kidnap and rape women in public, but also when they are compelled to do it in their own homes, which is regarded as private.

In India, marital rape is not considered a crime, and victims do not receive punishment. It is a frequent crime that occurs in one or more homes but goes unreported. Although the frequency of marital rape is unknown, numerous studies carried out in India indicate that husbands and family members frequently commit it.

Marital Rape is a conscious process of intimidation and assertion of the superiority of men over women. (Sana Shakil, March 2014)

Arguably marital rape is no less an offence than murder, culpable homicide or rape per se. It degrades the dignity of a woman and reduces her to a chattel to be used for a man's own pleasure and comfort. It reduces a human being to a corpse, living under the constant fear of hurt or injury. (Shikha Chhibar, 2016)

Marital rape has been shown to have long-lasting physical and psychological effects on women by medical data. Marital rape is a hidden, less-discussed concern since it is not recognized as a criminal offense.

Gangrape in Indian Context (Focus on Nirbhaya):

A 23-year-old physiotherapy student was gangraped in the well-known 2012 Delhi Gang Rape and Murder Case, better known as Nirbhaya. She was given the name Nirbhaya to conceal her identity from the public and media. Six guys, including the driver, viciously attacked her and her male companion when they boarded a private bus at night. Nirbhaya suffered significant internal injuries after being viciously attacked with an iron rod and gang raped, while the male companion was only bruised.

Later, the moving bus threw her and her male friend nude onto the road. On December 29, 2012, Nirbhaya passed away in a Singaporean hospital from her wounds, while her male friend survived because of her primary injuries.

The Delhi police apprehended six males (the accused), including one minor. In 2013, a trial court found four men guilty of rape and murder and sentenced them to death by penalty. One of the defendants, Ram Singh, died in jail (allegedly by suicide). The four convicted individuals were put to

death in March 2020 after the Honourable Supreme judicial of India upheld the death sentence in 2017 following numerous judicial appeals. Regretfully, a young defendant was freed after serving his time.

Gang rape has long been a problem in India; in addition to Nirbhaya, many girls are gangraped and killed there, but these cases have never been made public for a variety of reasons, including parents' reluctance to report it to the police out of respect for their daughters' honour and the rapists' use of social, political, and economic clout.

In addition to Nirbhaya, hundreds of thousands of lakhs of Indian girls are gang-raped; the majority of them perish from internal injuries as a result of the violence, and those who survive endure lifelong pain.

The victims are subjected to several societal stigmas from both their family and the general public. Instead of blaming the rapist, they are held accountable for their rape and their lifestyle and fashion choices. This is the society's hypocrisy. One of the numerous reasons rape goes unreported is because of "secondary victimization," which makes many victims afraid of how society will react if they approach the police or courts.

Child Sexual Abuse [POCSO]:

One of the most horrible crimes in the country is considered to be child rape or child sexual abuse. Even before the colonial era, child sexual abuse existed in India under the devadasi system, and it has been steadily rising to this day.

The physical, psychological, and mental health of victims of child sexual abuse may be negatively impacted for the rest of their lives. They also begin to develop other chronic ailments, like fibromyalgia and sexually transmitted diseases.

Genital or anal contact, vaginal penetration, pornography, oral sexual activities, molestation, sodomy, voyeurism, intoxication, exhibitionism, vaginal and anal fingering, and many other sexual practices that the child is not even aware of are among the forced sexual activities that the children are subjected to.

Types of Sexual Abuse of Children:

1) Penetrative-Sexual Assault: This refers to the act of a penis or an item entering a child's mouth, urethra, vagina, or anus.

- 2) Non-Penetrative Sexual Assault: This refers to physical contact with a child that is intended to be sexual but does not involve penetration.
- 3) Aggravated Penetrative Sexual Assault: When a parent, police officer, teacher, family member, or other adult in a position of power sexually assaults a kid.
- 4) Commercial exploitation includes the dissemination of pictures and videos showing children engaging in sexual activity as well as the trafficking of children for sex.
- 5) Incestuous Rape: This type of rape occurs when a family member or relative sexually abuses a child.

POCSO – Protection of Children against sexual Offences ACT 2012 is a comprehensive act to provide for the protection of children from the offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. While safeguarding the interests of the child at every stage of the judicial process by incorporating child friendly mechanism for reporting and recording statement of the child [Sarika S, 2021].

In order to protect children from sexual offenses in both penetrative and non-penetrative methods, the government passed POCSO in 2012. The act covers sexual harassment of both boys and girls and establishes special courts for expedited trials.

The question that still has to be answered is the extent to which the POCSO Act has reduced the rate of child rape. Although there has been a notable decline in child rape since its implementation, it is still insufficient because a kid is raped in the nation every 24 minutes.

Custodial / Institutional Rape [Muzaffarpur Shelter Home Case (CBI v. Brajesh Thakur, 2020)]:

Sexual harassment and sexual assault of women in state-run or community-run facilities, such as government-run schools, shelter homes, hostels, and orphanages, which are established for their safety.

Under the direction of Brajesh Thakur, the NGO Seva Sankalp Evam Vikas Samiti operated the state-funded shelter home Balika Grih in the district of

Muzaffarpur, Bihar, with the goal of caring for young girls.

During an examination of all the shelter houses in Bihar in 2017, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) discovered numerous instances of sexual abuse in Balika Grih's home.

The girls were drugged under the pretense of taking deworming pills, placed in an intoxicated state, and subjected to sexual assault, harassment, rape, abortion, and even death. The sexual assault of 34 out of 42 girls residing in the shelter home was substantiated by the Patna Medical Hospital.

A formal complaint was filed in May of 2018, but because of the delays, the Honourable Supreme Court took Suo Moto action and transferred the case to the CBI in August of the same year. Fast-track courts were established, and in January 2020, Brajesh Thakur and eighteen other people were found guilty of Aggravated Penetrative Sexual Assault and other POCSO-related offenses by the Delhi Court.

Some of the girls were taken by families, while others were moved to safer shelter homes.

The victims of this kind of sexual harassment and rape experience double oppression, which results in both rape trauma and a lack of faith in the institutions that are supposed to protect them.

Cyber Sexual Assault:

Cybersexual assault instances demonstrate that physical contact is not always necessary for rape and assault.

The use of technology to trick men, women, and children into sharing their private photos, which can then result in blackmail, is known as sexual harassment and abuse.

Later, these images are altered or shared inside the pornographic industry, which also leads to cyberstalking and sextortion.

Voyeurism results from the fact that some of these images and films were captured using covert or spy cameras.

This assault demonstrates that a snapshot or naked photo is sufficient to blackmail the victim, and that physical contact is not necessary to trick them into assault.

Legal Measures:

The IPC's Exception 2 states that a husband and wife engaging in sexual activity together is not considered rape. Therefore, although marital rape is illegal in India, women do have some indirect legal protections against it:

IPC Section 498 A: This section of the IPC makes it illegal for a husband or his family members to mistreat his married wife, which carries a jail sentence and a fine.

Women who feel wronged by an adult male perpetrator who is in a domestic relationship with them are covered by the Domestic Violence Act of 2005.

The Nirbhaya (Criminal Law Amendment) Act of 2013: This law was passed following the horrific Nirbhaya Case.

Rape was expanded beyond vaginal sex to include penetration of any object or bodily part.

There were new sections added to the IPC:

- a) IPC 354 D: Stalking (which also covers cyberstalking)
- b) IPC 354 C: Voyeurism
- c) Acid Attacks, IPC 326 A/326 B
- d) Sexual Harassment (IPC) 354 A
- e) 376 D (IPC) increased the minimum sentence for gang rape to 20 years.

The 2018 Criminal Law Amendment Act: This statute, which was strengthened following the Kathua and Unnao Case, stipulates that rape of a girl child under the age of 12 carries a death sentence, while rape of a girl child under the age of 16 carries a minimum sentence of 20 years.

In addition to protecting children under the age of 18, the POCSO Act of 2012 stipulates penalties for penetrative, nonpenetrative, and aggravated sexual assault.

Children who have been sexually assaulted can receive rehabilitation and protection under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

Section 376 (2)(a) IPC: This section punishes aggravated rape by a police officer, public servant, or any person in a position of authority.

Section 376C IPC: This section convicts anyone in a position of power, such as a teacher or warden, who abuses their position to commit sexual offenses.

Information Technology (IT) Act, 2002: IPS part 66(E): This part makes it illegal to publish someone else's photo of a private location without that person's permission.

IPC Sections 67 and 67A: It is illegal to publish non-consensual sexual content online or on social media.

Leaking someone else's private or personal photos or films is covered by IPC Section 72.

Conclusion:

In India, rape is not limited to gloomy lanes, warehouses, and deserted buildings; it can even occur in exquisitely furnished palaces and bungalows through marital rape. Not only do impoverished girls get raped, but women who are wealthy and elegant are often assaulted in their own homes, which are meant to protect them. Additionally, it takes place in a school where we study humanity and sex education. In every part of society, it takes place. Although the Nirbhaya case served as a wake-up call to the fact that rape can be so violent, there are numerous other incidents that are far more horrific. Additionally, it has demonstrated that rape does not require actual contact; merely an image may be used to create deepfakes, alter them, and post them on social media.

Despite everything that has transpired, the nation's so-called society still blames the raped woman and makes remarks about her attire.

Rape can happen to us, our mothers, and our sisters, in addition to impoverished women and orphans.

Article 4: Breaking the Sacred Ceiling: Women's Struggles for entry into Hindu Religious Spaces

Introduction:

Menstruating women are still viewed as “impure” in India, a beautiful and vast country that views all people equally under Article 14 of the Constitution and worships women as goddesses. These women are prohibited from sitting on couches, sleeping on mattresses, cooking, cleaning, performing rituals and practices, and visiting temples because doing so would compromise the “purity” of the temple. Because of how far society has come, it has become “normal” for women to be excluded during their periods, which stigmatizes women's bodies.

Hindu religious priests attempt to defend their actions by claiming that they must get enough of rest throughout their periods, which prevents them from doing all of these activities. However, since everyone has different needs and preferences, the question that still comes up is: What if a woman wants to pray when she is menstruating? Is she going to be permitted to enter Temples? Will she be permitted to pray? Can she do the rites on her own?

The Menstruating Goddess:

The Maa Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam, is the first temple that springs to mind while discussing menstruation. The sacrifice made by Goddess Sati to preserve her honour comes to mind when we consider Kamakhya Temple. Sati Learnt that she and her Shiva weren't invited to a yajna hosted by Daksha, her father while all other Gods and Goddesses were. She was embarrassed by her father when she confronted him and questioned him, and she retaliated through jumping in the yajna kund. Vishnu's

Sudarshana Chakra split the body of Sati into 108 pieces, and the Kamakhya temple is where the Yoni fell.

The mother goddess Kamakhya is represented at this temple as a Yoni (Womb), which is a Vulva or vagina and stands for fertility and the beginning of all life. Additionally, this temple holds an annual fair called the Ambubachi Mela, which takes place in June or July

when the Sun enters Mithuna Rashi. The river Brahmaputra, which flows alongside the temple, turns red during the three days of the fair when the Mother Goddess Kamakhya menstruates. The Yoni is dark red in colour, on the fourth day, when the temple's doors are opened to the public. Tantriks, Shakta's and Aghoris view these three days as crucial since it is the goddess' divine power, not defilement, that draws them to the temple.

The primary focus of this festival is menstruation, which is viewed as a socially stigmatized topic, making it a very special occasion. Menstruating women are still prohibited from entering many Indian temples, even after a festival of this kind has taken place in one of the country's most famous temples. How come a regular woman cannot be honoured during her menstruation while a goddess is honoured during the same time?

Andal-The Lover of Sri Ranganathar:

The sole female Alvar Saint in Tamil Nadu is Andal. She was born in SriVilliputhur Town sometime in the ninth or tenth century. According to legend, she was discovered asleep beneath a Tulsi plant as a new-born by Periyalvar, a priest at Sri Ranganathar Temple in Srirangam. He subsequently adopted her as his daughter. Andal loved Perumal, also known as Vishnu, from a very young age. Her love had grown as she grew older, and poetry was one way she expressed this. During the Tamil month of Margazhi, which falls between December and January, she wrote the Thiruppavai, a collection of thirty verses, each of which is recited daily. Andal urged people to commit themselves to Perumal/Vishnu through Thiruppavai. She is said to have worn garlands that she had made before presenting them to Sri Ranganathar; a priest discovered this after discovering a woman's hair in the garland. Ultimately, it is stated that Andal became one with her lover, Lord Perumal. She expressed her love for God through her spiritual voice, which was dominated by men at the time. Andal is depicted as a bride who was anticipating her marriage to the lord.

This demonstrates that love for God is not limited by religion. If Andal's devotion to God made her a goddess, then why can't regular women express their love for God while they are menstruating?

Every woman should have the same freedom to express her love and devotion to God throughout her life, just as Andal's commitment and love for him granted her a celestial position.

Sabarimala Temple Entry:

In 2018, Sabarimala, a temple devoted to the worship of the Hindu deity Ayyappa/Ayyappan, gained worldwide attention. The temple prohibited women between the ages of 10 and 50 who were menstruating, which sparked prejudice and inequity against women. Ayyappan is a Brahmachari Deity! it was claimed that Ayyappan's penance would be disrupted if menstrual women were let inside the temple.

Given the gravity of the situation, the Honourable Supreme Court of India decided to take matters into its own hands and issued a ruling in 2018 permitting women of all ages to enter the temple.

Although conservative organizations and other segments of society protested the court's decision, which was viewed as a historic step, conflicts between the judiciary and religion resulted. This tension persists because, despite legislative and judicial improvements, women continue to encounter significant resistance and discrimination based on physical impediments.

Conclusion:

In addition to raising concerns about their ability to practice their faith, women's struggles to demonstrate their devotion to God during their periods also reveal how social standards constrain them. When Andal's poetry and spirituality demonstrate her love for God, she can be viewed as a goddess. During the Ambubachi Mela, Maa Kamakhya is regarded as a potent energy source. However, women who are still alive are not allowed to enter temples.

CHAPTER III – EDUCATION AT THE MARGINS

Research Paper: “Layered Inequalities: Educational Realities of Dalit Girls, Disabled Girls, and Trans Learners.”

Abstract:

In India, social structures have a significant impact on educational opportunities, and because of current inequity, many minority communities find it extremely difficult to obtain high-quality education. Despite the implementation of numerous legislations, women who have historically been viewed as a burden continue to be marginalized in some spheres of society. These minority groups—Dalit women, disabled women, and transgender learners—experience a great deal of inequality that cannot be explained by caste, gender, or disability alone. Their daily problems help us comprehend how these minority women's unequal education and inequality are caused by caste hierarchies, gender norms, bodily differences, and social stigma. In order to comprehend how minority women and gender-diverse learners navigate institutional spaces that were never intended with their realities in mind, this study investigates these multifaceted experiences.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how intersecting identities lead to marginalization and thwart these minority women's educational goals. Despite being members of the same minority social group, they have quite distinct experiences. Dalit girls are excluded due to their gender and caste, and they are frequently denied access to education and pushed out or

besieged in their classrooms. While trans women are refused education because of gender nonconformity stigma, misgendering, and invisibility in school regulations, disabled girls are denied education because of their disability and systemic hurdles. The study illustrates how marginality varies, overlaps, and intensifies based on one's identity and lived circumstances by uniting various groups under a common framework.

This study employs a qualitative methodology and includes visits to non-governmental organizations that support transgender women, disability rights, and Dalit girls. The Research will directly collect lived experiences from students, community workers, and NGO educators through participant observations, narrative talks, and in-depth interviews. In order to reflect the everyday realities that official statistics frequently overlook, this grounded method helps go beyond numbers. By understanding case studies this paper gives a broader approach on inequality factors in education. Studying intersectionality requires consideration of emotions, resistance, cultural background, and personal history, all of which are made possible by the qualitative approach.

The results show that they experience exclusion, but in different ways. Dalit females stop attending school and continue to be illiterate because of caste bias, isolation from classroom interactions, and harassment in classrooms. Physical obstacles that disabled girls must overcome include inaccessible classrooms, lack of assistive technology, and insufficient support networks. Identity recognition is the most difficult task for trans students. Bullying, emotional abuse, staff misgendering, and inflexible educational systems that

do not support gender-diverse pupils are all common complaints. Families are vital to all three groups because they either provide support or reinforce the limitations of caste-bound and patriarchal standards.

The analysis demonstrates that bias is not the sole factor contributing to educational disparity; teacher preparation, inefficient governmental policies, and school curriculum are also factors. Despite these obstacles, kids aspire to get education like everyone else. Their goals demonstrate both hope and resistance, serving as a reminder that marginalized students are always negotiating their position within the educational system.

This paper makes the case that knowing how caste, gender, disability, and identity interact to create multilayer disadvantages is essential to achieving true educational equality. The experiences of trans students, Dalit girls, and girls with disabilities highlight the need for inclusive legislation, sensitive educators, easily accessible facilities, and robust social support.

Introduction:

Education in India is celebrated as a vehicle for empowerment, mobility, and social transformation. Yet even today, the Indian educational system continues to discriminate on the hierarchies of gender, caste, class and race. For many learners like Dalit girls, girls with disabilities and transgender students, the promise of equal education still remains excluded. Even after the Constitution of India guaranteeing the citizens with various rights, laws and protections- such as the Right to Education Act (2009), the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights Act) of (2019) the effectiveness of these rights can only be determined through their lived experiences.

This Research Paper investigates the ways in which intersecting marginalities limit educational participation for three minority learner groups: Dalit, Disabled and Trans Girls. It gathers insights through Reports, Interviews, and Participant Observation.

The aim of this paper is to uncover how these girls experience such discriminations in their everyday lives.

Intersectionality:

Intersectionality is an absolutely essential factor in the comprehension of how various identities such as caste, gender, class, disability, etc. combine to determine people's life situations. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term to explain that the experiences of black women could not be grasped by looking only at gender or race separately.

Intersectionality matters in the Indian context because caste, patriarchy, etc. are stuff deeply ingrained in the social institutions of Indian society. For instance, the experience of a Dalit girl is not identical to that of a Dalit boy in the area of discrimination. A Dalit girl is discriminated not only by her caste but also by her gender and patriarchal norms, which is quite different from the discrimination of a Dalit boy.

Intersectionality ensures that policy, research, and activism do not consider marginalized groups as standard categories. It aids in bringing to the light the unheard experiences associated with these groups and thus, facilitates the promotion of context-sensitive solutions. So, intersectionality is indispensable to grasp the concept of inequality in an accurate way and to be able to tackle it effectively.

Queer Theory in Education:

Queer Theory is the product of the research of scholars like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedwick, and Michel Foucault, and it was formally recognized in the 1990s.

Queer Theory refuses to acknowledge fixed, binary gender and sexual identities and theorizes that these are socially constructed, fluid, and depend on the power relations within society.

For example, in the Education sector, Queer Theory inquires into the manner in which schools, curriculums, and classroom practices not only assume heteronormativity-but also, how through them, this assumption is re-enforced. The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and fits neatly into male/female binary is taken for granted. Furthermore, it looks into how such standards cause the exclusion of those students who are not able to meet such anticipations, among them are the transgender, non-binary, gender-nonconforming, and queer students.

Queer Theory in educational spaces examines those regulatory mechanisms through which the schools become regulatory institutions. Educational systems, through morality codes, sporting events, records, uniforms, seating arrangements, and even school diaries, implicate the enforcement of the binary gender norms. Conversations in the classroom, textbooks, and teachers' views also commonly support the silence around queer identities.

Significant legal and social changes have led to the increased importance of Queer Theory in India. The Supreme Court in *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) granted recognition to transgender persons as a "third gender" and a host of rights was enumerated. The *Navtej Johar v. Union of India* (2018) decision followed consequently to decriminalize the consensual same-sex relations, thus being a really big step in the Indian legal discourse of sexuality. Nonetheless, educational institutions have been lethargic in effecting these changes. Transgender and queer students are forced to go through schools established on the basis of gender binaries. Boys' and girls' schools, gendered uniforms, segregated hostels are the places they have to amaze. Most of them encounter bullying, and exclusion, besides being termed in a wrong way and having no support at the institutional level. Queer Theory is thus helpful in understanding how Indian schools perpetuate these hierarchies especially when they do it in the unintentional way through their daily practices.

Moreover, Queer Theory gives a conceptual tool with which the absence of queer narratives in Indian textbooks can be challenged.

While the NCERT (2017) tried to support the idea of integration of transgender children in the beginning, after the political pressure it was withdrawn demonstrating that educational policy, too, is not immune to the influence of social conservatism. Queer Theory aids in understanding such stoppages as "curricular erasure" instances whereby the re-appearance of certain identities in the production of knowledge is either deliberately or structurally blocked.

Besides, Queer Theory facilitates the creation of queer-friendly educational methods. In India, it comprises the installation of gender-neutral restrooms, the implementation of a flexible uniform policy, the formulation of bullying guidelines, and the design of teacher training programs concerning gender diversity. It is also about giving importance to the indigenization of Indian queer experiences such as Hijra, Kinnar, and other non-binary identities that existed before the Western queer terminology came to be. Therefore, Queer Theory in India has to juggle between worldwide research and local past, and at the same time, it has to recognize that queer identities in India have not only cultural and social but also historical roots.

In brief, Queer Theory in Education is a potent instrument used to interrogate heteronormative structures, push for schools that welcome all learners, and make sure that every single student, no matter what their gender identity or sexuality may be, enjoys the right to education with dignity.

Caste Based Exclusion of Women:

In India, the caste-based exclusion of women is an intersectional issue that lies at the intersection of gender and caste hierarchies, thus creating a more advanced layered system of oppression. It can be said that caste discrimination affects entire communities; however, the background of Dalit, Adivasi, and other marginalized-caste women is such that they face an increased level of marginalization, as they experience both patriarchy and casteism. This "double disadvantage" has a decisive impact on their access to education, freedom of movement, safety, and opportunities right from their childhood.

Biased behavior on the part of the caste can be traced far back to the very beginning of educational spaces where unfortunately, most of the discriminated children are caste girls. Dalit girls are usually subtly segregated as they are given the instructions to sit at the back of the classroom, and are assigned to the cleaning of the room or even discouraged from participating in academic works.

Teachers' low expectations, discriminatory words, and curricular invisibility are means through which their teachers and peers alienate them. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes, through its research works, has revealed that among all the children dropout the most are the girls from the Dalit community and the reasons are poverty, caste harassment, and school environments which are not socially safe for them. A new dimension of the malpractices suffering the children of the Dalit community in schools manifests itself in the form of discrimination in mid-day meal. In the same

context, children belonging to dominant castes refuse to eat cooked food prepared by the Dalit women. This is happening in several states, and it indicates how the persistence of caste norms in the daily life of schools influences educational practices.

Furthermore, on top of that-caste-based patriarchal norms outside educational establishments have been cutting off the arteries of the Dalit women's thought and expression; thus, their mobility and decision-making power have been restrained. Their participation in education is brought to a halt by early marriage, unpaid labour, and the fear of upper-caste violence. Incidents of sexual assault against the victims due to their caste, like the Hathras case - are the examples of the usage of sexual violence as a method to operate caste hierarchies by dominant-caste males and to silence Dalit women. Such violence introduces a message, which among other things, prohibits girls from seeking public visibility or education.

Moreover, the condition of not having land plus economic dependency further plunge into the problem of exclusion. Cases of dominant-caste families who are paying Dalit women as agricultural or domestic workers, but at a more humiliating rate, are thus shedding light on an ongoing bad cycle of economic vulnerability that is continuous and because of which girls are deprived of schooling. Although there are government schemes, their impact is limited due to poor implementation and cultural obstacles.

Therefore, the caste-based exclusion of women in India is far from being a single-layered social problem, but rather a structurally embedded one in schools, communities, families, and labor systems. Knowing the intersection

is the main point for the construction of fair educational and social environments for the women of the marginalized groups.

Discrimination of Disabled Girls:

India's census of 2011, recorded that 2.2% of the country's population live with disabilities. The actual number is considered to be a lot more by various people due to factors like underreporting, stigma, and lack of awareness. The invisibility of people with disabilities starts from the very core of the families. Many children with disabilities-especially girls-are kept locked in room due to the fear of social judgment, shame, or the belief that disability is a karmic burden. Consequently, disability is that which remains hidden and silent, thereby strengthening the silence itself.

Besides that, schools do not recognize disabilities due to lack of the accessibility of the infrastructures of the schools, lack of the trained teachers, or inclusive classroom practices. Most regular schools refuse to admit children with disabilities or parental consent is demanded by the school authorities so that the children can be shifted to "special schools". Families tend to choose education for non-disabled siblings and so the exclusion of girls with disabilities is that much higher. The invisibility that exists in this context is also curricular: There are hardly any textbooks that introduce disabled individuals as leaders, workers, or simple citizens, which helps in the formation of a society where disability is considered as

something weird or that deserves pity instead of being a natural human diversity.

On the other hand, institutionally, the implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, has loopholes which create gaps in places such as schools. Schools are without functional ramps for example, tools for auditory learning, tactile materials, and sign-language instructors. Public areas and government buildings are also not accessible to everyone hence engaging in civic life becomes a challenge. The lack of facilities in this area is making people with disabilities to feel that they do not belong in public spaces.

From a social perspective, the medical model of disability is the most commonly accepted one- that is, the defect which needs to be fixed only is what disability is-while a rights-based or social model is hardly ever used. The persons with disabilities are not given opportunities to be in the decision-making bodies, apart from this, they have limited representation in the media and leadership roles, hence, the invisibility of the persons is being reinforced.

Disability invisibility in India, therefore, is not merely the absence of presence but a deeper structural exclusion brought about by stigma, insufficient policy implementation, and the failure to view disability as part of human diversity.

Exclusion of Trans Learners in Education:

The exclusion of transgender learners in Indian education is not just a matter of separation, but a very structural problem that has its roots in gender normativity, caste patriarchy, stigma, and institutional neglect. Educational institutions in India still operate as spaces differentiated by gender in which the terms "boy" and "girl" are the determinants for uniforms, toilets, sports, seating, hostels as well as moral behaviour. For transgender and gender-diverse students, these facilities turn into daily places of invisibility, antagonism, and psychological injury.

Despite the fact that the NALSA v. Union of India (2014) verdict gave recognition to transgender people as a "third gender" and guaranteed the right to education and dignity, changes at the grassroots level have been sluggish. Schools seldom make changes in their admission forms, record-keeping systems, or bathroom regulations. Most still insist on students choosing "male" or "female," which means transgender students have to either deliberately misgender themselves or be administratively rejected. NCERT's 2017 trans-inclusive strategy was pulled off after a political uproar, which shows that even educational policy is influenced by the conservative gender diversity-related concerns.

The rate at which students drop out of schools is very high. The Humsafar Trust, Kinnar Vidya Foundation, and Sangama, are some of the organizations working at the grassroots level that point out transient and/or non-continuous school attendance between 12 to 16 years as a characteristic

of the majority of trans persons, and among the causes, they list mostly harassment, familial rejection, and fear of violence.

After being pushed away, the majority do not have the means to access different schooling models, get continuing education, or find friendly mentors thereby they are forced to live in the informal sector or engage in insecure jobs. Rejection by one's family only adds to the problem of educational exclusion. Many transgender children receive emotional abuse at home; they are not given clothing that corresponds with their gender identity and sometimes they are subjected to forced conformity. In the worst situations, they are expelled and thus start the road to homelessness at a young age. Without the support of their families, it is next to impossible to finish formal education.

Furthermore, the same trends are reproduced by higher education. Certain universities (e.g., TISS, Hyderabad Central University) have implemented inclusive policies; however, the majority of institutions do not have gender-neutral hostels, counsellors with LGBTQIA+ qualifications, or viable ways for the alteration of name and gender in academic records. Trans students commonly discontinue their studies due to depression or other mental health issues that result from the feelings of being left out and the occurrence of bureaucratic obstacles.

Progress in the law has not completely filled the policy gaps. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019, which was intended to enhance the rights of transgender people, has been blamed for its difficult process of obtaining the certificate, its medicalization, as well as for lacking

provisions that allow schools to be held accountable. Sensitization programmes for teachers, their instruction, as well as updated curricula, if these are not complemented by each other, the policy will remain largely a symbolic one.

Exclusion is the result of not only individual prejudice but also the architecture of schooling-binary categories, moral policing, caste patriarchy, surveillance of bodies, and lack of gender-diverse representation in textbooks or pedagogy, which is the Indian education system's way of sustaining and perpetuating the problem. The Indian education system is still built on the assumption that all students are heterosexual, cisgender, and thus compliant to social norms, which is why it is so hard to recognize trans students as legitimate participants, not as exceptions.

India will have to think of schools as places quite different from what they are now if it wants to establish educational spaces where students can feel safe—this would involve things like having gender-neutral policies, administrative practices that are easy for everyone to use, teacher sensitization, anti-bullying laws, counselling support, as well as the visible presence of transgender histories and contributions. Transgender inclusion is far from being just one of the school administrative reforms; rather, it implies a complete change of the social and cultural imagination concerning the notion of a "normal student".

Issues Faced by Dalit, Trans and Disabled Girls to Avail Education:

A] Access to Education:

Access to education is the basis of inclusion. However, Dalit, disabled, and transgender girls continue to face various challenges even before they step into the classroom.

Caste-based norms for Dalit girls impose restrictions on their mobility and give more importance to domestic labour than to schooling. A lot of them live in isolated villages where there are no primary schools or schools are located in dominant-caste villages, thus making both physical and social entry unsafe. In various rural areas, dominant-caste families refuse to send their children to village schools if Dalit children are going to study there thus, exclusion is getting more and more strengthened.

Disabled girls are refused admission in schools although they have legal rights under the RPwD Act. A lot of schools state that they "are not in a position to facilitate" children with intellectual or physical disabilities because they do not have enough staff or resources. Parents are frequently informed that they should enroll their children in special schools even when integration is feasible.

Transgender girls have difficulties in access that come from the stigma towards their identity. The majority of them leave school after puberty because they are bullied and the schools' authorities do not recognize their gender identity. Rules regarding uniforms, gender-segregated facilities, and

binary school records make many dropouts even before they have completed secondary education.

Therefore, access goes beyond the issue of the availability of schooling and is mainly dependent on social acceptance, safety, and institutional readiness to include.

B] Infrastructure Barriers:

Dalit girls frequently go to under-resourced government schools that have minimal infrastructure—non-functioning toilets, no drinking water, and buildings that are not safe. Inadequate sanitation, especially, is the issue that Dalit girls face during menstruation, as they are stigmatized and tend to stay away from the school. Many schools situated in the neighbourhoods of the dominant caste continue to be socially unwelcoming.

The lack of proper infrastructure is the most significant factor that hinders disabled girls. The majority of schools do not have ramps, tactile flooring, toilets that are accessible to wheelchairs, auditory learning aids, and proper signage. Transport services are either very limited or completely absent. The physical surroundings convey that disabled bodies are not anticipated or welcomed.

Transgender girls face the lack of gender-neutral toilets, hostels that are segregated, and private spaces for changing. If they use the boys' or girls' toilet, they are exposed to harassment, and hence, the school becomes a place where they are physically unsafe. Also, the absence of health support

and stigma, for trans girls who are on hormonal transition, act as additional barriers to their participation.

C] Discrimination in Classrooms:

Dalit girls are always insisted on sitting apart from others, generally at the back or far away from dominant-caste children. Teachers might call them with insulting names or even if they don't ignore their needs, they do not provide enough help in their education.

They are often left out of group activities, which thus, supports the caste system. Disabled girls receive poor treatment and have low expectations set for them. Teachers may talk over them, not noticing their hand-raising, or assume they are unable. Children with learning disabilities are referred to as "slow," "weak," or "mentally unfit," which leads to them being emotionally hurt.

Transgender girls have to face continuous misgendering, imitation of their mannerisms, and receiving very personal questions about their bodies.

Teachers sometimes punish gender-nonconforming behaviour to help students accept their identity through punishment, thus, they reinforce the regulation of identity based on punishment.

D] Curriculum Issues:

For Dalit girls, the depiction of Dalit women in the textbooks as a woman of the model, an intellectual, or a leader is very rare. Most of the time, Dalit

characters are either completely removed from the story or are described through the narratives of giving. The removal of these characters strengthens the idea of caste inferiority.

Disabled girls have very little representation in textbooks except for the medicalized descriptions of their disabilities. The stories hardly ever include disabled protagonists, which limits the aspirations of disabled children and makes exclusion normal.

The curricular erasure for transgender girls is even more drastic than that of the other groups mentioned. The textbooks present gender as a strict binary. The identifications of transgender individuals are either not there or are being considered negatively. The removal of the trans-inclusive material by NCERT after the 2017 attempt under the pressure is an example of institutional resistance.

E] Safety and Harassment:

Dalit female children have the most significant chance of experiencing sexual violence that originates from the caste system, primarily in the countryside. The situation in Hathras is an example of the way in which males of the dominant caste use violence as a means to establish again the power of the caste system. The vulnerability of girls increases along with the long distances to schools.

Disabled female children have an increased probability of being ill-treated as they are dependent on others for their mobility. The absence of accessible toilets is a factor that contributes to the sexual harassment of girls.

Transgender female children receive severe verbal, psychological, and physical abuse in schools and areas open to the public. Teachers rarely come to the rescue and, therefore, consider the bullying "a joke." Hostels, because of gender segregation, are very unsafe places in particular.

F] Economic Exclusion:

Dalit families are mostly dependent on daily wage labor. The expenses of schooling – uniform, travel, and tuition – become beyond their reach. Girls are taken back from the school to help provide the household income or take care of the younger ones.

Disabled girls have to bear more costs: medical appointments, necessary devices, therapy, wheelchairs, and transport. These make education a heavy financial burden.

Transgender girls most of the time suffer from economic abandonment after the rejection of the family. Without financial support, continuing education becomes a matter of impossibility, thus the majority are forced to take up informal and unsafe jobs.

Though there are scholarships, they are mostly delayed, insufficient, or not properly announced.

Educational Policies:

A) Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:

The RTE act is a landmark reform in India's educational history and is widely recognized. It offers education free of charge to the first six years to children from 6 to 14 years of age in government schools; also, it provides 25% of seats for the economically weaker section in private schools.

Key Features

- Free and compulsory education for ages 6-14.
- No detention policy, continuous evaluation.
- 25% reservation in private schools for disadvantaged groups.
- Physical punishment, screening tests, and capitation fees prohibited.
- School infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and teacher qualifications regulated.

Effectiveness and Challenges: The RTE has led to an increase in the number of children going to school, with a particular focus on the girls from Dalit and Adivasi communities. Nevertheless, caste-based discrimination is still perpetuated in the classrooms where students are segregated, teachers show biases in their attitudes, and the participation of the caste is limited. Besides, transgender children are not provided with any kind of support in the RTE context as the act does not explicitly mention the issue of gender identity, thus they are exposed to be bullied and dropping out. Although the Law has made it possible for every child to receive an education, the

disadvantaged groups still come across social and cultural barriers that are deeply ingrained, and these cannot be torn down by the Law alone.

B] Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016:

The RPwD Act (which replaced the PwD Act of 1995) is the most comprehensive disability rights legislation in India. It is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Key Provisions

E.g., the recognized disabilities are expanded from 7 to 21 categories, such as intellectual disability, autism, cerebral palsy, and learning disabilities. Education is a major focus where non-discrimination, equitable access, and reasonable accommodation are mandated. The schools are required to provide inclusive education, assistive technologies, and special educators who are trained. Persons with disabilities are given 5% reservation in higher education. There are strong penalties for discrimination.

Effectiveness and Challenges:

The Act takes a rights-based approach and is progressive.

But, the implementation is weak:

As an example, most schools have no ramps, accessible classrooms, sign language teachers, and toilets that are friendly to people with disabilities. Disabled girls have even more invisibility because families, which often deprioritize their education, are the main decision-makers. The teachers

very often are not trained and therefore they are not able to handle the diverse disabilities. So, while the RPwD Act has laid down a strong legal foundation, the lack of infrastructure and the mentality of people have restrained its reach.

C] National Education Policy (NEP), 2020:

NEP 2020 is a comprehensive policy that aims to change India's whole education system radically. Inclusion is one of the main things that it is after.

Key Features

Universalization of education from preschool to Grade 12.

Foundational literacy and numeracy as a national priority.

Multidisciplinary education at the higher level.

Mother-tongue-based instruction in early years.

Strong emphasis on gender inclusion, social justice, and inclusive education.

Provisions for Marginalized Students-Creation of Gender-Inclusion Fund for girl students and transgender learners.

Special Education Zones (SEZ) in disadvantaged regions.

Focus on children from SC/ST, minority, and disability groups.

Promotion of alternative schooling models for Dropouts

Effectiveness & Limitations: NEP 2020 recognizes more of the intersectionality concept than previous policies. Nevertheless:

The Gender-Inclusion Fund has been gradually implemented.

Transgender learners are still structurally marginalized due to such school practices as binary uniforms and toilets.

NEP's proposals are not compulsory and thus implementation depends on the states.

Although it has a futuristic design, NEP 2020 still needs stronger monitoring mechanisms if the inclusive education goals are to be accomplished.

D] Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:

This Act serves as India's primary landmark legislation concerning transgender rights and goes further to include the right to education. The Act forbids discrimination in any area, that is, education, employment, healthcare, and housing.

Key Provisions

There should be no discrimination in education or denial of admission.

The right to define one's own gender.

It is the duty of the government and schools to provide facilities that are gender-inclusive.

The formation of the National Council for Transgender Persons.

Effectiveness & Critiques:

The Act is a historic decision but it also has its drawbacks:

The originally proposed requirement for a District Magistrate certification (now changed) was considered to be against the principle of self-identification.

Schools continue to be run on binary norms; the majority do not have gender-neutral toilets or uniform options.

Transgender students face extreme bullying, are misgendered, and subjected to emotional abuse.

Teachers receive very little training on gender diversity.

Therefore, although the provisions of the Act are forward-looking, the social stigma associated with the issue and the rigidity of the institutions hinder real participation.

India's policy framework looks good on paper but the deeply entrenched social barriers such as the caste system, patriarchal norms, stigma against the disabled, and gender rigidity that affect the educational experiences of marginalized girls, disabled learners, and transgender students are still there. Policies must not stop at merely providing symbolic gestures but they need to be practically and well-resourced implemented.

Structural change is dependent on teachers being sensitized, the presence of inclusive infrastructure, school systems that are flexible and strong monitoring mechanisms that hold institutions accountable.

Educational Barriers in India:

A) Teacher Bias:

Bias from the side of teachers is among the top most widespread and at the same time, it is one of the least recognized sneaky discriminations that exist inside Indian schools. Education employees are like a wheel with a double power - they create the atmosphere of a classroom, distribute the chances, and also affect the self-esteem of the students. In fact, their biases, which are sometimes only in a small degree, change in a great measure the educational results of those children who have been socially excluded.

a) Caste Based Bias:

Dalit children are still subjected to caste discrimination both overtly and covertly. Frequently, teachers academically underestimate Dalit girls, considering them to be "weak," "dirty," or "less intelligent." In certain areas, Dalit students have to sit separately and they are the last ones in line for meals at school. These behaviors might not be documented, but they are very much ingrained.

Discrimination of this kind leads to less involvement, higher dropout rates, and a feeling of being inferior in the targeted group. The case of

Dalit girls is that they have to bear on their shoulders the patriarchal gender stereotypes as well as the caste-based stigmatization.

b) Disability Based Bias:

Often, educators are quick to decide that children with disabilities are not in a position to manage normal school without their assistance, and they do this regardless of the real capacity of such children. Educators might choose to overlook the needs of deaf or hard-of-hearing students who also face learning challenges, continue with the same outdated methods of teaching, and in the worst case scenario, they see these kids as the recipients of the giving hand and not as young people who have the same abilities as their peers.

It is known that the majority of educators have no training in the educational needs of the differently-abled, which makes them commit the unintentional act of marginalizing those students. Thus, the reason why "integration" is only visible on documents, whereas "inclusive learning" is rarely evident at all.

c) Gender and Sexuality Based Bias:

It is a common practice that girls are prompted to choose "soft" subjects and their ambition is discouraged. In comparison, transgender students are subjected to more brutal treatment: a teacher might ridicule the way they express their gender, tightly enforce dress codes or simply not recognize their chosen names.

Teacher biases are not merely attitudinal; they deeply impact attendance, academic performance, self-confidence, and even future goals. Changes in the education system will not be able to bring about real inclusion unless these biases are removed first.

B] Poor Implementation of Policies:

India is equipped with a set of powerful laws that ensure the inclusion of diverse groups in education such as –

Right to Education Act (2009)

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2019)

National Education Policy (2020)

There is, however, a very big difference between the law and the actual situation on the ground.

a) Administrative Gaps:

Policies are frequently delivered to educational institutions in pieces or in a less effective manner. As an example, RTE requires inclusion; however, in a lot of schools, disabled children or transgender students are still being refused admission illegally. There are also anti-discrimination provisions in the guidelines of the midday meal, but the mechanisms for the supervision are not strong.

b) Lack of Teacher Training:

Only a handful of teachers get properly sensitized about caste discrimination, disability inclusion, or LGBTQ+ rights. A teacher who is not given training can hardly implement policies even if he tries. Inclusive education turns out to be a chant rather than an organized program.

c) Inadequate Budgeting:

Implementation lacks sufficient funding consistently:

Though schools are legally required to have special educators, there are none in schools.

There is no provision of assistive devices.

Money set aside for ramps, toilets, or gender-neutral facilities is remaining because these projects are not being initiated.

Scholarships are delayed and have a complicated bureaucratic process.

Policies that do not receive support from finance and administration remain at the level of symbols.

d) Weak Accountability:

Discrimination reporting structures that include mechanisms such as School Management Committees or grievance cells, are usually without result. The control of the education system in villages by the dominant caste makes the Dalit parents silent about the difficulties they face. The fear of egregious consequences for them keeps the transgender students from filing their complaints of the ill-treatment they have been subjected to.

e) Token Inclusion

Quite a few educational institutions merely go through the motions when it comes to reform, for instance, they construct a ramp but do not make sure that the classrooms are accessible or they hold a "Day of Inclusion" event while not removing the existent structural discrimination.

Incorrect application of these regulations converts them into hollow statements which are the only things that these laws appear to be, thus, the students belonging to marginalized groups are left with scarce provisions.

C] Exclusion from Infrastructure:

Infrastructure shapes who can physically access and comfortably navigate school spaces. In India, infrastructure often excludes the very groups that policies claim to include.

a) Accessibility Barriers for Disabled Students:

In spite of the requirements imposed by the RPwD Act, the vast majority of educational institutions have not removed architectural barriers. Some of the most frequently raised issues are:

Non-existence of ramps or ramps that are dangerous and cannot be used.

Non-existence of wheelchair-friendly toilets.

Non-existence of tactile paths for visually impaired learners.

Non-existence of auditory signals, Braille signage, or accessible learning materials

Non-existence of transportation support

Moreover, safety problems like unlighted paths, inaccessible menstrual hygiene facilities, and long distances make the attendance of girls with disabilities lower and thus, welfare and equal opportunities are further deprived.

b) Caste-Based Spatial Segregation:

Moreover, caste hierarchies are being reproduced by infrastructure:

Schools are generally situated in areas where the dominant caste lives; therefore, Dalit children have to go far by foot and along the way, they are subjected to harassment.

There are villages where Dalit children have been told that they use separate drinking water points or toilets.

The bad quality of the infrastructure in government schools is that it has a greater impact on the children of the Dalit and Adivasi communities, especially girls.

c) Gendered Infrastructure Gaps:

Girls' toilettes are usually devoid of privacy, water, doors, or dustbins.

Hence, there is a phenomenon of going absent during the period of menstruation, which is particularly the case of Dalit and tribal girls.

The situation of hostels can be described as bad, dangerous, or simply not existing in a lot of villages. The absence of safe hostels deprives many girls of the opportunity to continue their education at the secondary level.

d) Transgender Exclusion:

Infrastructure is a daily reminder of how society tries to erase transgender bodies:

Gender-neutral toilets are non-existent.

Hostel admissions are done on the basis of the sex assigned at birth.

Uniform and dress codes that promote gender binaries

There are no changing rooms for people of different genders.

There are no clinic facilities or mental health support.

When school spaces become a source of stigma, transgender students discontinue their education - not because they are incapable, but because the infrastructure communicates that they do not belong. Hence, infrastructure is a place where exclusion happens both physically and symbolically.

Conclusion:

Teacher bias, mismanagement of policies, lack of facilities for the differently-abled, trans invisibility, and intersectional marginalization are not five different problems that exist separately in the Indian education system—they are nets that entangle each other to make a system of education in India highly unjust. In India, the educational system that is supposed to be inclusive as per the laws and policies is depicted by the daily experiences of

Dalit girls, disabled children, transgender students, and other marginalized groups, which demonstrate a system that is having a hard time changing.

It takes addressing these systemic revelations to have:

- strict teacher training
- teachers should be held responsible for any kind of discrimination they practice-
- real budgeting for accessibility
- trans-inclusive education policies
- intersectional data collection
- participation of the local people
- curriculum reform

Indian schools can only be the places where children from all backgrounds are able to study with dignity, safety, and equal chances if there is a complete structural change.

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